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SUBJECT: 2009 PREPARATIONS FOR POSSIBLE FLOODS IN TOGO

¶1. Summary. Annual floods are the most devastating natural disaster occurring regularly in Togo. Battered by rainstorms in the north in 2007 and the south in 2008, Togo is preparing for possible severe flood damage in 2009. In April, violent winds in the interior of the country ravaged rooftops, and residents in the capital, Lome, have been dealing with moderate flooding for several weeks. The government of Togo (GOT) has started to plan for its response to greater problems. End Summary.

History of floods in Togo in recent years

¶2. Togo has experienced heavy seasonal flooding for the past few years, especially in 2007 and 2008. In 2007, flooding was the worst in September and affected mainly the northern region. At least 17 people died, and 14,000 others were displaced because their homes were flooded or washed away. Bridges were washed out, cutting off access to isolated villages.

¶3. The 2008 floods also caused important damage countrywide, mostly in the southern region, in July and August. According to the GOT, last year's flooding killed nine people, injured 80 and displaced more than 10,000. The GOT launched the Assistance Organization Plan (Plan d'Organisation des Secours, ORSEC) on July 31. This is a plan for disaster management and victim rescue. The impact of last year's flooding had not yet disappeared when heavy rains started again this year (2009).

GOT Preparations for 2009 Floods

¶4. The GOT has started emergency disaster planning earlier this year. From April 13 to 17, 2009, the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection held a training workshop in Notse (95 km north of Lome) for fifty delegates from ministries, NGOs, civil society, prefects (regional governors), and traditional chiefs. The United Nations provided financial support.

¶5. The purpose of the workshop was to establish procedures for disaster management, develop a national contingency plan, and track the frequency and scale of disasters in order to be better prepared for future incidents. By the end of the workshop, participants had learned how they can raise awareness of disaster preparation and response in their own districts. Prefects are now in charge of coordinating advance preparations and relief efforts in their zones, as well as alerting people about possible flooding. One participant noted that "the government learned from its mistakes" of last year. Since the workshop, actions have been taken to raise awareness of the issue, including broadcasts on radio and TV stations, newspaper articles, and training meetings. The issue is discussed at every Cabinet meeting.

¶6. On June 29, the Minister of Security and Civil Protection briefed Cabinet members on damages caused by the latest rains in Lome and the interior of the country. The GOT is addressing the situation, for now, by providing material assistance to victims, using security forces to manage the situation, and distributing materials remaining from the emergency supplies received last year.

¶7. Comment. Although the GOT is better prepared for possible floods in 2009, everything depends on how heavy and lasting the rains are.

Even with the preparations, if the floods are as severe as in years past, the GOT will be forced once again to request international assistance. End Comment.

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